

**Seeds of Collapse: Exploring the Role of the Public in the Wake of Industrial  
Collapse**

Honors Research Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation *with Distinction in  
Art, Printmaking* in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

By

Joel Atkinson

The Ohio State University

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Project Advisor: Professor Charles Massey Jr., Department of Art, Printmaking Focus

My original proposal for an Undergraduate Research Project has gone through many stages in its development, primarily through the use of printmaking processes. Many of my original intentions have changed over the course of the past three quarters. My artistic style/creative focus has remained consistent throughout the body of work that I have produced for this project; however I have changed the format by which my prints are to be viewed in order to better integrate the expanded ideas I discovered as I worked over these three quarters.

My original project was to produce shocking yet honest imagery depicting the many ills of our society, including genetically modified food, pollution, and industrial decay. I made this work with the intention of putting it into the public sphere so as to shock the public into realizing the threat that these issues pose to public space and safety. In this original body of work, I was critiquing and unveiling a very disturbed aspect of our culture, which is typically hidden from the public (see Figures 1-4). Partly, I made images as a way of expressing frustration and anger that had built up in me over a period of time as a result of compulsively updating my knowledge of current U.S. politics and world news. I watched countless companies get away with environmental crimes with a mere slap on the wrist and saw the U.S. slip into economic recession; I was compelled to respond with anything but apathy. So I made work about these tragedies, yet I did not feel satisfied with these prints because they always ended up being only illustrations of the present. I felt stuck in this two-dimensional trap because I was trying to articulate these ideas and frustrations, but the images never looked how they did in my head. The root of this problem was that I failed to let the work communicate back to me because I was

trying to put too many ideas into a small two-dimensional space. Instead of this, I needed to start with a general concept and through the development of the piece let the work tell me where to go from there. I made one more print to showcase this collapse and plight of the American empire and industrial civilization as a whole (Figures 5-6). I produced it as a woodcut that I view as an epic narrative of our current existence as an industrial nation. The woodblock that I used to print from is six feet tall and from it, I also made multiple, smaller prints in black ink on paper. I used these prints to showcase the ideas that I was attempting to articulate with my previous work but now on a larger scale.

After printing this woodcut, I arrived at a juncture in the development of my work and processes. I began a divergence into a brighter and more hopeful set of ideas. This new body of work rose out of ideas surrounding what comes after industrial collapse. In my vision of the future, the next logical step after collapse is room for new growth and space for nature to take over once again. Part of this new growth is the need for an urban agricultural revolution. I made more relief prints to encourage the spreading of seeds from fruit bearing plants along with vegetables. I made colorful prints of vegetable plants and plant forms, but I also pasted actual seeds into the print in an attempt to encourage the public to take parts of my artwork. I organized the seeds into tabs that were meant to be pulled and planted to further encourage the public to grow their own food (see Figures 7-8). By allowing the tearing of the print, the partial destruction can be seen as a commitment to the idea itself; growing food became more important than the art alone.

As I explored this new body of work, I also pulled myself out of working two-dimensionally with the use of collage. I started to cut my prints out of their traditional frames, and this act led to what would be the final composition of my solo exhibition. I

also began to experiment with wood construction so as to build a relationship between sculpture and print (see Figures 9-10). I sculpted organic wooden forms as separate but relatable compliments to my prints. More importantly, this use of collage gave me the expanded use of material and thus the freedom to work with my older prints and my recent prints side by side to assemble a larger and more comprehensive piece. This act transformed a very static and frustrating body of work into something fresh and full of life. All of the ideas that I tried to provide in the past work could now be placed into a new context. Although the prints became freed of their traditional boundaries, they retained the commitment to a purposeful idea or image that is inherent with printed material. I realized that throughout my undergraduate research I was working through and building a puzzle, which could not be solved wholly within an arrested image within a frame. The act of cutting out pieces and revising them became a fundamental focal point for my solo exhibition and began to inform all of my other work. The final product was a dynamic display of cut outs assembled into one comprehensive piece that summed up the whole body of themes that I struggled with resolving throughout the project. I employed the same technique of collage with the newer prints of plant forms, which was also assembled into a similar composition as the older work had been. These two collages were installed into my final show on opposing sides of the gallery to highlight the contrast and duality inherent in the divergence from my old print, which made visible the critical devastation I saw present in a contemporary world, to a new one of a reactivated nature (see Figures 11-12).

Overall, my research as an artist caused me to make a major shift in both my process and the conceptual drivers behind my work as a printmaker. Most importantly, I



made a symbolic transition from a two-dimensional medium, which had always constrained my process and concept, into a tactile and sculptural style that was manifested as a comprehensive collaged structure placed in concert with abstracted, three-dimensional compositions combining built (perhaps industrial) forms with the physical forms of nature (see Figures 13-14). Once this shift was made, my thesis work started to speak to me and I developed a new dialogue with old ideas. I began to solve the puzzle that I had been building throughout this project. The final solution to this puzzle resulted in a large panoramic depiction of the metaphorical monster within our culture. I arranged it in such a way that the viewer was left with images that spoke to different issues depending on who was engaged with the work. The folk nature of the collage also spoke to a broader audience who perhaps may not be familiar with the world of fine art but is still interested. This was ultimately the goal of my project in that it encourages audience participation and public discourse about the apparatus behind a culture in constant struggle between public space and private space.

This work serves as a vocabulary for the viewer to use in order to open a conversation about these difficult issues and articulate possible ways forward. It is now from the challenges of this experience and its resolution that I come a step closer to bridging the gap between fine arts and the greater community for the purpose of encouraging the public to continue in the ongoing struggle to defend and hold onto what remains of the public sphere.



Fig. 1 \_ *Athens Greece* \_ 20"x15" \_ Lithograph



Fig. 2 \_ *The Harvest* \_ 7"x5" \_ Intaglio





Fig. 3 \_ *High Fructose* \_ 12"x16" \_ Lithograph





Fig. 4 \_ *Untitled* \_ 24"x32" \_ Lithograph





Fig. 5 \_ *Civilization Unravels* \_ 48"x72" \_ Woodcut Relief

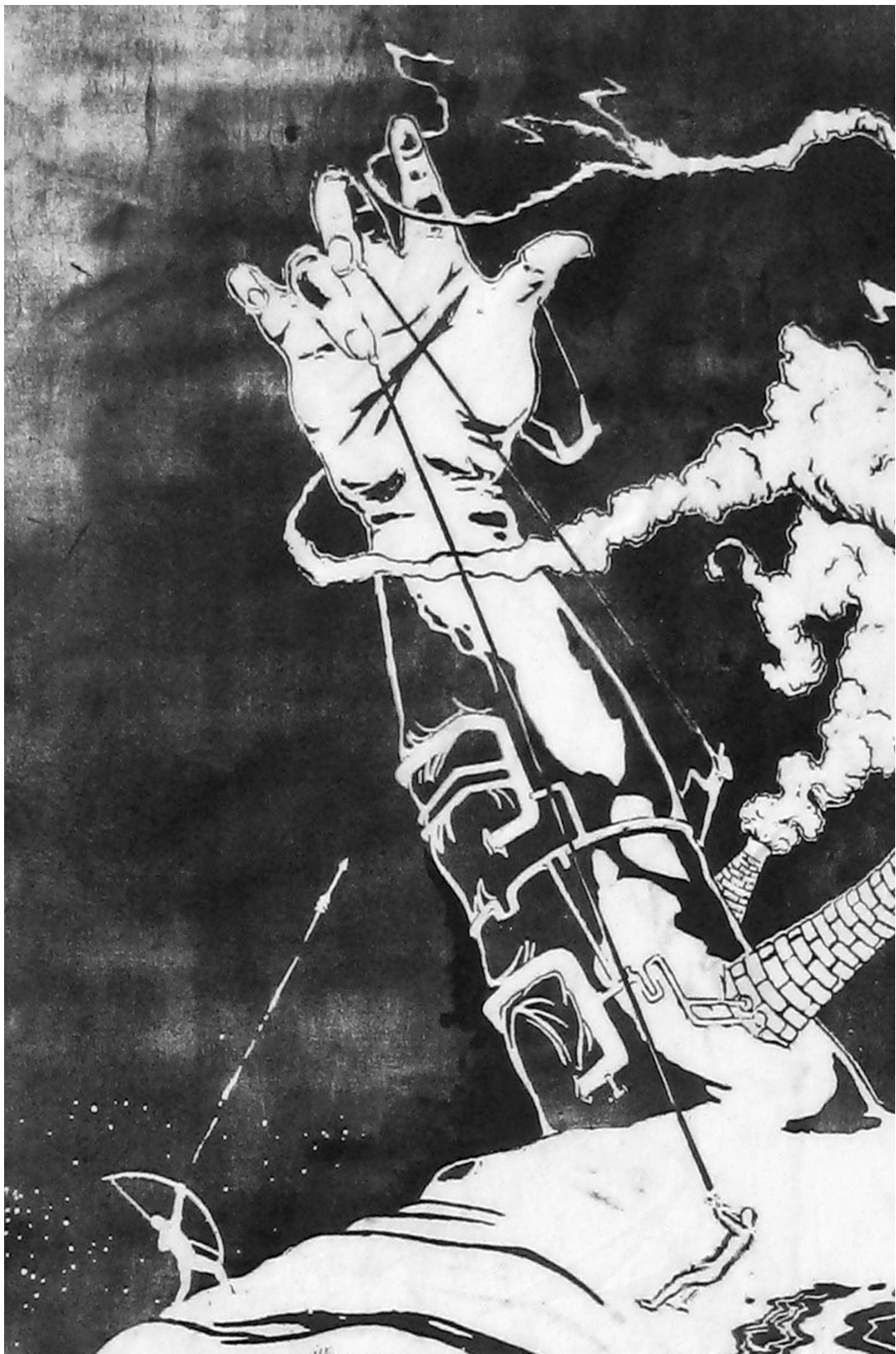


Fig. 6 \_ *Civilization Unravels: Detail*



Fig. 7 \_Jubilee Tomatoes \_ 10"x12" \_ Linocut Relief





Fig. 8 \_ Cucumber \_ 32"x24" \_ Linocut Relief





Fig. 9\_Thesis Show\_Sculpture



Fig. 10 \_ Thesis Show \_ Sculpture



Fig. 11 \_ Thesis Show \_ Collage: Industry



Fig. 12 \_ Thesis Show \_ Collage: Plant Forms



Detail Shots: Plant Forms



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Detail Shots: Collapse



